

ST. PAUL

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Part 1

The Life of Paul

Paul was the master mind of the apostolic age and, after Jesus, he is the most dynamic personality in the New Testament. The story of the spread of Christianity in the North Mediterranean world is the story of his career. So far as one man's influence can determine the direction of a whole movement, Paul was the greatest single influence in the early Christian church. His conversion was a major development of Christianity and much of its doctrine and organization can be traced to the form which Paul gave it.

I have chosen the theme of St. Paul and his conversion for several reasons; first, I am interested in the man himself, his personality and driving force, but it is the conversion that generates a greater curiosity and intrigue by the very fact that Paul was initially the scourge of the early Christians. One wonders how Christianity would have fared if Paul hadn't been converted on the road to Damascus. And finally the similarity on a lesser scale of St. Paul with Brigham Young, the founder of Mormonism.

The main theme of this essay is the conversion itself and the various interpretations that have been given for it. However, in order to bring the conversion into perspective, I think it is relevant that the events in Paul's life be documented so as to give us some insight into the type of man most *unlikely* to be converted.

Paul was born A.D. circa 1 and died circa 64 at the time of the Neronian persecution. His birthplace was Tarsus in Cilicia which was "no mean city". Tarsus was a university centre famed for its philosophy and general learning. Paul was a "Roman born" which implies that his father had been granted Roman citizenship either by purchase or for some service rendered to the Empire. Paul's parents or an earlier generation had migrated to Tarsus, possibly from Galilee. Arising thus in one of the chief cities of the Empire, Paul had that cosmopolitan sense and interests which so admirably fitted him to understand life in the great centres where he later introduced Christianity.

There is no doubt about Paul's Jewishness, for he emphasized it again and again. Manifestly both parents were earnest, loyal Jews. The book of Acts. up to 13:9 calls him "Saul" and after that "Paul"; In his own writings he uses only the name "Paul". As a boy in Tarsus he could have had both names, Saul his Jewish

name, and, being a Roman citizen, he would have been given a Roman name⁽¹⁾.

Paul's earliest education was in his own home, which evidently was a typical devout Jewish household. He may have learned Aramaic in his childhood home, though he could have acquired it later when resident in Jerusalem; at any rate, he could speak Aramaic⁽²⁾. It goes without saying that he knew Greek for his letters were all written in that language. Further, any Jewish boy in the Diaspora would have spoken Greek. Presumably there was a synagogue in Tarsus where Paul learned to know the Jewish Scriptures and where he was trained in the Jewish faith and practice. In the light of Phil. 3:5 we would not suppose that Paul was sent to a Gentile school in his youth. While still in his teens he was sent to Jerusalem for scribal training under the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel⁽³⁾. Whether formally educated in a gentile school at Tarsus or not, the influence of his Hellenistic environment in Tarsus would have been penetrating not only in his youth but in his maturer years. Two features of Hellenism in Tarsus are important to note; one was the local mystery cult of the divinity Sandan, identified by Greek writers with Hercules, with ceremonies celebrating his "awakening" or "arising" (i.e. resurrection); the other was the fact that Tarsus was one of the chief centres of the Stoic school of philosophy. Paul's letters evidence his thorough acquaintance with both these features of Hellenistic life and thought.

Paul as a Rabbi:

Between the completion of Paul's scribal training and his conversion, a period elapsed which he spent either in Jerusalem or more likely Tarsus or elsewhere. At the end of that time we find him in Jerusalem, a zealous Jewish worker; "after the straightest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee"⁽⁴⁾. He was ardent in persecuting the Christians. It is doubtful if Paul was in Jerusalem during the last week of Jesus' life and equally doubtful that he ever saw Jesus. He persecuted the Christians because he felt himself to be a defender of the faith of his fathers. Christianity was an independent reforming movement, and Paul with other Jewish leaders, took alarm and sought to suppress it. Paul was present when Stephen was stoned to death and "was consenting unto his death"⁽⁵⁾. Acts. 26:10 represents Paul as saying that when the Christians he persecuted were put to death, "I gave my vote against them". Some sources imply this to mean that Paul was an official; voting a death sentence, but more likely its meaning is only that their death had his moral approval as, being a Diaspora Jew, Paul would not have been a member of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin.

Paul's Conversion:

The year of Paul's conversion is variously calculated by interpreters; presumably it occurred sometime between the ages of 30 and 35. Paul refers to his conversion in Gal. 1:15 and Acts. give an account of it three times⁽⁶⁾. We know that it occurred near the city of Damascus whither he was going to persecute the Christians. It completely changed Paul's life and from then on he believed that the moral purpose of the experience was that he might preach Christ among the gentiles. A more detailed description of Paul's conversion and its various interpretations will follow in part II.

The Early Years of Paul's Christian Life:

Immediately following his conversion, Paul "went away into Arabia"⁽⁷⁾ which probably means that he at once began missionary activities in the Nabatean Kingdom, with its capital at Petra. He returned to Damascus, where Acts. 9:20–25 indicates that he engaged in evangelistic activities. After three years (following his conversion), he visited Jerusalem where he spent a fortnight with Cephas (Peter?) after which he went to his native Tarsus. Undoubtedly he engaged in missionary activities in Tarsus and Cilicia for the next several years, perhaps ten in all. He worked there until he was summoned to Antioch by Barnabus. He worked for a whole year in Antioch during the famine of '46. Thereafter he and Barnabus made a trip to Jerusalem to carry relief to the needy Christians there.

After his return to Antioch, Paul began a series of missionary journeys from Antioch as a base which carried him across the North Mediterranean world to Rome, the story of which occupies all the rest of the Acts from chapter 13 until the end.

Paul's Missionary Journeys:

Acts. 13 is the narrative of Paul's first missionary journey. His companions were Barnabus and John Mark. They sailed to the island of Cyprus, journeyed through the island, and sailed to Pamphylia on the mainland of Asia Minor. John Mark left the party at Perga in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem for some reason not stated⁽⁸⁾. From Perga Paul and Barnabus went up to the Anatolian Plateau and evangelized the cities of Antioch and Pisidia (13:14–52), Iconium (14:1–16), Lystra (14:6–20), and Derbe (14:20). From Derbe they retraced their course over the same ground to Pamphylia and sailed to Antioch in Syria (14:21–28).

The admission of gentiles into Christianity without first requiring them to become Jewish proselytes precipitated a controversy between Paul and the Jewish Christian group in Jerusalem. It necessitated a trip by Paul to Jerusalem to settle the matter. Paul's own account is given in Gal. 2; Acts. 15 presents a different version.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey:

Acts. 15:36 – 18:22 tells about Paul's second missionary journey which carried him to the continent of Europe. His companion at the outset was Silas, they later took on Timothy and Luke⁽⁹⁾.

Starting from Antioch, they travelled overland through Syria and Cilicia, which allowed Paul to visit his home town, Tarsus. Passing through the Cilician Gates to the Anatolian Plateau, Paul revisited the Galatian churches which he had founded on his first journey. Paul intended to go to Ephesus but was prevented from going for some reason or other⁽¹⁰⁾. He then planned to go north into Bithnia but was thwarted again⁽¹¹⁾. They made their way to Troas (ancient Troy) and sailed from there to Macadonia.

The first place on the continent of Europe which Paul evangelized was Philippi where he encountered the opposition of certain interests which were adversely affected by Christianity; Paul and Silas were imprisoned and when re-

leased, left the town. They went next to Thessalonica where their preaching caused a riot which obliged Paul and Silas to leave the town under cover of night. They proceeded to Beroea but were followed there by troublemakers from Thessalonica. Paul had to leave Beroea but Silas and Timothy continued the work there.

Paul journeyed on to Athens where he made his famous address before Areopagus in the presence of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. From Athens he went to Corinth. Not long after his arrival there, perhaps three months, he was joined by Silas and Timothy, who came from Macedonia. The news they brought him caused Paul to write a letter to the Christians at Thessalonica⁽¹²⁾. First Thessalonians therefore enjoys the distinction of being the oldest book in the New Testament. After that Paul continued his Christian work in Corinth for about a year and a half. Toward the end of his stay in this city disquieting news reached Paul from the churches in Galacia concerning the disturbing Judaizers who had gone there after Paul left, whereupon Paul wrote his famous letter to the Galacians. When Paul left Corinth he sailed over to Ephesus for a brief visit and thence to Caesarea where he "went up and saluted the church" which probably means that he made a brief visit to Jerusalem. He then made his way to Antioch in Syria thus ending his second missionary journey.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey :

Paul's third missionary journey began at Antioch in Syria, took him through Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, and ended in Jerusalem. From Antioch he travelled along the same route as his second journey, revisiting the churches of Galatia, and then went to Ephesus where he remained for three years. Paul's associates in the work of Ephesus were Timothy, Titus, Erastus and Sosthenes⁽¹³⁾. At the end of the journey Luke and several others were associated with Paul.

Hellenistic religious cults met and mingled at Ephesus. Paul found there what appeared to have been a small remnant of the John the Baptist movement. There were also wandering Jewish exorcists. The cult of magic thrived in Ephesus among the Jews as well as the gentiles. Books of magic were sold about the country as charms against evil spirits and were worn as amulets or inscribed on doorposts, garden gates and the like. A vast number of such magical papyri have survived to the present day but they are not very interesting. The Emperor cult was also prevalent. However, most important of all was the cult of the local goddess Artemis (Diana) ... Paul's preaching so undercut this cult that a riot was precipitated by the silversmiths who made small Artemis shrines. This is the first time that direct hostility was directed at Christianity due to trade interests⁽¹⁴⁾. "All with one voice cried out, Great Artemis of the Ephesians"⁽¹⁵⁾, which probably means not insensate yelling but the chanting of a long Artemis liturgy⁽¹⁶⁾.

Probably Paul was imprisoned for a time in Ephesus, due to the tense situation there. His remark, "I fought with beasts at Ephesus" seems to imply that he was forced to do combat in the arena. In Acts. 20:29 certain heretics at Ephesus are spoken of as "grievous wolves" a fight with beasts may, on the other hand, be a figure of speech.

While located in Ephesus, Paul exchanged letters with Christians in Corinth. Thus arose First and Second Corinthians. Relations between Paul and the church at Corinth had become strained, and from Ephesus Paul made a brief trip to Corinth and back in an unsuccessful attempt to straighten out the difficulty. As his letters failed to solve the trouble, Paul sent Titus to Corinth. Before Titus returned, Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas where he worked for a short time. From there Paul crossed over into Macedonia, where he met Titus, presumably at Philippi, bearing the news that the trouble in Corinth had been settled. In great relief and joy Paul wrote what is incorporated in 2 Cor. 1:9.

During his three month stay in Corinth, Paul considered what his future plans for missionary work should be. He considered that his work in the eastern part of the Mediterranean world was done⁽¹⁷⁾. He therefore planned to go west. For many years he had wanted to visit Rome. However, Christianity was already established in Rome and Paul would not "build upon another man's foundation"; he would preach the gospel only where Christ was not already named. Therefore he planned to go to Spain⁽¹⁸⁾, and visit Rome en route. If he were to carry out his missionary work in the west, he would need a base at Rome, just as Antioch in Syria had hitherto been his base. To prepare for his visit to Rome, Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans.

For some time Paul had been carrying on a practical philanthropic enterprise in the gathering of relief funds among the gentile groups for the benefit of the Christians in Jerusalem. The fund was now complete and Paul took the fund to Jerusalem. En route he was advised to stay away from the city to avoid serious trouble. But Paul was not deterred.

Paul said that he was "in prisons more abundantly than any other Christian missionary". Acts. tells of his imprisonment at Philippi and I have already indicated the possibility of his being imprisoned at Ephesus. However, we have no other means of knowing what other imprisonments Paul referred to in his statement which was made before his final trip to Jerusalem.

Paul reached Jerusalem and promptly greeted the Christian leaders there. Presumably he delivered the relief fund to them, but there is not a single word of appreciation to Paul for the gift on which he had expended so much time and effort and on which he counted to bring about good will between the Jewish and gentile churches.

The day after his arrival, Paul went to the temple with certain Jews who were to perform some purification rite for which Paul was to pay; a rite lasting a week. An onset was made upon Paul by some Jews from a province in Asia who mistakenly supposed that the men with Paul were gentiles whom Paul had sacrilegiously led beyond the Court of the Gentiles into the Court of the Men of Israel. Notices were posted in Greek forbidding gentiles to pass beyond the Court of the Gentiles and any Jew finding a gentile in the inner court was privileged to strike him dead on the spot. One of these Greek inscriptions read:

"Let no foreigner enter within the screen and enclosure surrounding the sanctuary. Whoever is found doing so will be the cause of his own death".

The incident precipitated a riot which the Roman military tribune hastened with troops to quiet. He permitted Paul to address the mob but as they became more irritated and demanded Paul's death, the tribune placed him under arrest. The next day Paul made a speech in defence of himself before the Sanhedrin but to no avail. For safety, the tribune placed him in the tower of Antonia. A plot, presumably by Sicarii to assassinate Paul was reported to his nephew, whereupon the tribune sent Paul under heavy guard to the prosecutor Felix at Caesarea. All this happened around A.D. circa 58, in the time of Felix, when Palistine was in a chaotic state.

Paul, after a hearing by Felix, was kept in prison for two years. In the course of his hearing, Paul happened to mention that he had come to Palistine "to bring alms to my nation, and offerings", which aroused the cupidity of Felix who "hoped withal that money would be given him of Paul".

Felix was succeeded by Festus as procurator of Judea in the year 60. Festus promptly examined Paul and proposed that he go up to Jerusalem to be tried there. Paul refused, and stood upon his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to the Emperor. Festus had no option in the matter. He was obliged to send Paul to Rome but he was put to it to know just what sort of accusation to send to the Emperor with the prisoner. Presently, King Agrippa II came to Caesarea to greet Festus. Festus told Agrippa about the case and Agrippa expressed a wish to hear the prisoner, whereupon Paul pleaded his cause before the Jewish king. Agrippa's judgement was that "this man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar". Once those fateful words, "Caesarum appello" had escaped the lips of a Roman citizen, there was no retraction. The issue was forced. The die was cast.

To Rome:

The narrative of Paul's journey to Rome as a prisoner, with its story of the shipwreck is one of the most vividly dramatic passages in the whole Bible (Acts. 27:1 — 28:16). An interview with certain Jewish leaders in Rome is also recorded. However, besides that, all that is said concerning Paul's experience in Rome is that he "was suffered to abide by himself with the soldier that guarded him And that he abode for two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him"⁽¹⁹⁾.

During the years of his imprisonment in Rome, Paul not only continued to preach but he also wrote letters to certain of his churches. Paul's letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians are commonly called the imprisonment epistles, and the conventional view is that they were written by Paul while a prisoner in Rome⁽²⁰⁾.

Acts. ends in a most disappointing way to the modern reader. Why did not Luke tell of the outcome of Paul's trial? Was he acquitted or was he convicted and executed? Why, then, did Luke not say so? We can surmise that to have done so would have defeated his purpose, which was to command Christianity to the Roman world. If, after telling the story of Christianity's origin and spread to

Rome, which is the subject of Luke-Acts., he had at the end pointed out that the chief architect of its spread had been put to death by the Emperor as an enemy of the state, Roman readers would have turned away from Christianity in disgust. However, in a cryptic way Luke has indicated that Paul was dead at the end of the story⁽²¹⁾.

The Roman Empire was a vast domain. Judicial business for such a large domain must have kept the imperial supreme court docket congested, which would account for the delay in settling Paul's case at Rome. The tradition is that Paul was beheaded at the command of Nero, probably in the year 64.

Paul the Man

Paul was born a Jew by race, and he had been a Jew in religion; indeed, he never ceased to think of himself as belonging to God's people (Rom. 11:1) and to yearn for the ultimate inclusion of the Jews in God's gracious purpose. His message was proclaimed in terms familiar to Jews — the Law, Faith, the Promises, the righteousness of God, The Judgement, the Spirit — however unacceptable these themes might be to his fellow religionists. Paul was of course a Hellenistic Jew, a Jew of the Diaspora, who wrote in Greek, used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and at points betrays his Hellenistic influences. Paul must therefore be appraised in the light of the mingled Greek and oriental syncretism which was the atmosphere of the first-century Mediterranean world.

Paul was a Christian although he never uses this word. Jew and Greek alike were only custodians "until Christ came"⁽²²⁾, and he felt himself to be "under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians to preach the gospel"⁽²³⁾. He quotes no Hellenistic sources in his writings, only the Old Testament; and the impact of the larger world around him must be discerned in his ideas, style of writing, and unconscious absorption of the contemporary culture, rather than in direct borrowing. The centrality of Christ is evident on every page of his letters.

When the student has exhausted all the resources at his disposal in appraising Paul as a Jew, Hellenist, Christian, Paul himself is still unexplained. Something has been left out — indeed, the most important something. Paul was a unique person. Just as aunts see now the father and now the mother in the child, so we can see now the Jew and now the Hellenist in Paul. But the child is not his father or his mother; he is himself. Paul was emphatically himself. His letters to the churches of Galacia, to Thessolinica, to Gorinth, or to Philippi, are not just the serious communication of a Christian theologian; it is Paul writing, and the unmistakable flavour of his personality pervades them. Perhaps it would have been easier to estimate him if his letters had been less personal, for we get hints, flashes, intimations, of a rich, many-sided, complex character who remains something of an enigma in spite of the unusually revelatory nature of our sources. But as Paul's thought is clear in its main outlines, however difficult in particular aspects, so his personality is reasonably clear, however complex and baffling certain traits may seem to be.

We possess no reliable evidence regarding Paul's physical appearance except his own quotations from opponents. "They say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account'⁽²⁴⁾". A collection of second-century legends say that Paul was small in stature, bald-headed, bowlegged, of vigorous physique, with meeting eyebrows and a slightly hooked nose, and full of grace. Paul himself writes of a recurrent physical ailment, deliverance from which he was not granted although he prayed three times for it. He came to see that this weakness of the flesh had its lesson for him⁽²⁵⁾. All conjunctures as to the nature of this affliction — epilepsy, malaria, an eye malady, must remain conjunctures, since we simply do not have enough evidence for a diagnosis⁽²⁶⁾. The amazing list of physical hardships endured⁽²⁷⁾ witnesses to a rather rugged physical constitution than a frail one. That Paul was by nature a sensitive, proud, quick-tempered man can be abundantly documented from his letters, for he is conscious of his tendency to boast, and glorifies in the victory Christ assures, and by the sublimation made possible by another object of glorying. He is capable of sarcasm and irony, although he himself regrets that his opponents have maneuvered him into playing the fool.

Paul had a genius for friendship. The extraordinary list of twenty seven names in Rom. 16 with just the little touches here and there that save it from being a mere catalogue, is eloquent for his concern for people. He could be magnanimous — this protagonist, even with persons whose motives were questionable (Phil. 1: 12–18). He was tenderhearted — this fighter for his own understanding of the gospel — ready to share not only the gospel of God, but also "our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (I Thes. 2: 7–8). The catalogue of his physical sufferings reaches its climax, not in some physical agony, but in the words, "apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?"⁽²⁸⁾.

Although Paul travelled through spectacular country, his letters are wanting in figures from nature in either its humbler or more majestic aspects. The few nature illustrations he does use⁽²⁹⁾ are not very happy. But when he turns to city life, the arena, the court, the military, he is often effective in analogy, imagery, and figure of speech⁽³⁰⁾.

One wonders if Paul had a sense of humour? The writings we possess are all so deadly serious in intent that the lighter touch may well have been rigorously excluded, but with all his truly extraordinary gifts as a phrase-maker, the humorous, witty flavour so characteristic of Paul's Jesus is missing.

The most serious charge that can be brought against Paul is his personal inconsistency. Proclaiming an ethos of love, did he himself deal with his opponents lovingly? Especially in Galatians and in II Corinthians 10–13, Paul uses sarcasm, irony, and bitter denunciation, including curses against those who have attacked him and his gospel. Without attempting to defend him, for he himself is conscious that his words do not represent a very high plane of thinking (II Cor. 11:1). His language betrays an oriental exuberance foreign to the usual standards of western speech and writing. There are letters, after all, and they show a spontaneity which

more careful editing would perhaps have modified. His opponents, moreover, are not attacking him and his message from outside the Christian movement but from within it. He can endure persecution from the "world" (II Cor. 11:23-33) without any hint of bitterness — indeed, as almost normal Christian experience, the sharing of "his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10) — but when the gospel is attacked directly or indirectly through his own apostleship, he indignantly strikes back. He knows the teachings of Jesus about loving thine enemy (Rom. 12:14) and has lived it out in some of his personal relationships. Cast out by his fellow Jews, he maintains a moving loyalty to them and is convinced that their rejection of the gospel is only temporary and that, in the providence of God, it has opened doors to Gentiles. But when from within the Christian fellowship leaders play upon the fickleness, the credulity, and the lower nature of his converts to subvert what Paul believes to be the gospel of the love and grace of God in Christ, he meets the challenge with all the force of his aroused emotions and his agile mind. We may argue that Paul was deficient in an understanding of his opponents and less loving in his attitude toward them than he ought to have been, but he does not condemn them out of personal pique. He believes that the gospel itself in all its implications is at stake; he could do nothing less than meet this danger with vigour. This is more than mere rationalization, it becomes apparent when we consider how Paul dealt with rivalries between the partisans and genuine Christian leaders. Cephas, Apollos, Paul — who are they? "Servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God"⁽³¹⁾ rivalry is unthinkable.

Paul's Theology

Paul's letters afford us rich first hand source material for his thinking. Yet, as letters, they depend on situations and relationships known to the writer and his readers but not always entirely clear to us. The epistolary form of our sources creates another difficulty. The letters do not purport to be a systematic presentation of Paul's theology; their content is rather determined by the needs of the reader as Paul conceives these needs. Accordingly the nature of our sources is at once an asset and a liability — an asset because we are able to come at Paul's thinking so directly and in immediate relation to human situations; a liability because we must undertake to organize his thinking without any systematic presentation from his own hand.

We seek for a key that will open Paul's thoughts or, better, some central thesis about which all his thinking may be arranged. Paul's doctrine of God, of Christ, of man; Paul's background, Jewish and Hellenistic; Paul's religious experience; these and other focuses have been proposed as central in his theology. Solid gains can be achieved by this method, even when a single thesis proves inadequate. However, we must bear in mind that we are not dealing with theological treatises, but with first hand communication addressed by a complex personality to diverse human situations.

Jesus had read and interpreted the Law in terms of his view of God's whole nature and intentions, thus reducing all the "Law and the prophets" to the basic

rules: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and thy neighbour as thyself". This was not the same as the Pharisee teaching that every precept of the Law was binding in itself. The main issue between Jesus and the Pharisees had been the authority of the Oral Law followed by the question of the guiding principles by which the Law was to be interpreted and applied.

When the Apostles acclaimed Jesus' resurrection, it seemed to them that God had given his verdict on Jesus' side. While they could simply accept and act on this belief without questioning its implications too deeply, the trained Pharisee, Paul, was presented with a theological and spiritual problem of the utmost significance; the Gospel v. the Law.

The teachers of Judaism preached the Law (Torah) as a means of achieving righteousness. Paul denied this. To him the Torah was a divine measuring rod which demonstrated man's hopeless condition, since no human being could ever obey it completely. Judaism does not regard man as born into a state of ineradicable sin. He is ruled by both good and evil and has to make the choice between them. If he strives to do good, he must have God's help to overcome evil.

Paul's thinking was dominated by the doctrine of original sin which maintains that Adam's sin has remained an eternal imperfection in the human race, preventing man from ever becoming wholly good. In contrast, the joyful and loving life led by Jesus' disciples must have been glaringly apparent to Paul. At first it provoked him to merciless repression but ultimately he was forced to compare their attitude — and especially Stephen's peaceful death in the spirit of his master — with his own inner struggles between conscience and nature. Paul had learned from his own experience that God's law could not bring salvation from sin. Salvation could only be achieved by the personal intervention of God in the form which was revealed to the ex-Pharisee on the road to Damascus, through the person of Jesus, God's son who shared God's very nature.

To Paul, God had revealed himself "in the face of Jesus Christ" just as, in the Old Testament, He had Himself appeared to men. Moreover, Jesus' death on the cross had made possible a "universal death to sin": "For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"⁽³²⁾.

In the future, those who were not united with Jesus could share his death in sin. Moreover, they could, through him "die unto the Law" that they "might live unto God"⁽³³⁾.

Thus the essential element in all Paul's Gospel becomes the message of salvation, i.e. the making of life everything that God intended it should be. This was, first of all, an intensely personal, individual experience; but his message was also a universal one, of fellowship in love such as he had found within the early Church. Paul was responsible, above all others, for the conception of the Church as the body of Christ, a social organism of persons united by an animating spirit and directing mind, centered in its head, Jesus Christ. Paul taught that Christ was the spirit, or lifesaving principle of the new form of the covenant, as distinct from the old form of the Law or "letters" and, through his Church, his spirit enabled

men to share his nature and will and to do God's pleasure⁽³⁴⁾. Thus even the most blatant backsliding never raised any doubt in his mind that, with the help of the other members of the "Body" any ailing member could be made whole again and "saved" into healthful life by the power of Christ.

Christ who was sinless, had suffered and been crucified in atonement for the sins of mankind. With this act, the Law had been cancelled. Jesus' resurrection was the guarantee of salvation for mankind which it extended to Jew and Gentile alike. It has been said that for Paul, the resurrection had the importance which earlier sectarian thought had attached to baptism. It also supplied the vital element in his eschatological teaching. In the life of the risen Christ he saw the prototype for the future life of all who were "Christ's"⁽³⁵⁾. In speaking to the Gentiles, it became the beginning, the goal and the manifestation of the new life⁽³⁶⁾.

Paul's Conversion

At last we have come to the central theme of this essay, namely the conversion of Paul. I presume that up until now you have read in vain trying to discover something pertaining to "revelation"; Paul's conversion is, in my estimate, one of the greatest revelations ever shown to man as he was probably the first and definitely the last to receive direct revelation from God. But then, on the other hand, was it indeed revelation, or was it merely the machinations of Paul's mind. I would like to present the facts of the "Damascus Road Incident" and the various interpretations.

If we only had Paul's words in Galatians, we would assume that his place of residence at the time of his conversion was Damascus. Since he never mentions Tarsus and speaks of not going "up to Jerusalem" but of returning "to Damascus". It is the account in Acts. of his education in and his persecuting activity in and out from Jerusalem, together with the conversion on the Damascus Road that predisposes us to his residence being Jerusalem.

Conversion is a convenient word for Paul's transformation, although Paul himself calls it a revelation⁽³⁶⁾, a new creation⁽³⁷⁾, and an appearance⁽³⁸⁾. It does not mean a radical about face in his attitude toward the followers of Jesus, on the one hand, and his estimate of the role of the Jewish law on the other. There are several implications usually associated with the word "conversion" which are not appropriate in describing Paul's experience. He was not changed from a morally bad man to a morally good man nor from an irreligious to a religious man. He had, he insists, always striven to obey the Law and in the eyes of men could claim to be blameless. If the seventh chapter of Romans is considered to be autobiographical, it does not refute this claim, for it was his powerlessness to obey the law perfectly, rather than licentiousness or any type of gross immorality, that drove Paul to the verge of despair⁽³⁹⁾. Nor was it a conversion in the sense of a change from one religion to another. Paul never consciously forsook Judaism

for Christianity. The gospel he insisted on was the proclamation of age-old plan and purpose of God, which his fellow religionists had so tragically rejected⁽⁴⁰⁾. Paul did assert that the function of the law had been misunderstood, and he endeavoured to prove the true relationship of faith and the law from the very history of his own people. To the end he yearned for their redemption and believed that in the Providence of God, Israel's temporary rejection of the gospel opened the door to the Gentiles, and that ultimately, "all Israel will be saved". It was dissatisfaction with himself, and so with man as man in isolation with God, which was the background for the central experience that transformed Paul.

Various attempts have been made to rationalize the conversion in psychological terms. Paul was moved, it is held, by the behaviour of Christians under persecution, especially by the behaviour of Stephen. Their spirit, unbroken and unembittered by persecution, witnessed to an inner peace that he himself longed for. He tried to resolve his own inner conflict by externalizing it and persecuting the Christians, who represented one side of his inner conflict. This only intensified the struggle, which was resolved by the vision on the Damascus road, for only an external stimulus adequate for reorganizing Paul's inner self could avail. He believed that it was an outside life and light and energy that flooded his embattled mind and heart to bring him into a new creative state of being, and he named this power "Christ", "the Spirit (of Christ)", and his new state he called being "in Christ".

All writers agree that fulminant, or lightning types of conversions occur for the most part in connection with some important or trivial event of the external or internal life; a vision, voices, a luminous nocturnal phenomenon or some other less significant circumstances. The subject experiences a sudden overturning of his whole being; the entire course of his life is changed. In the case of Paul, the classic type of lightning conversion occurred. Also the old religious books describe religious conversion in the same way as they describe "cures" miraculously effected at the touch of the magician, the rabbi or the saint. It is not without significance, that books which deal with modern conversions tend to consider conversion as a physical process quite capable of analysis.

Even the non-theological criticism of facts in connection with instantaneity appear to be of distinct value. Paul, they say, was agitated by doubt even before the vision on the road to Damascus. His conversion then, may not have been instantaneous. There is so little known of the actual conversion of Paul that we can only speculate on the real causes. It is curious that the chief witness to the fact — Paul himself — does not give a detailed account of the one event in his life that had such a profound effect on him. He recounts the words which were spoken to him in the Syriac-Aramaic language by Jesus, but the texts are not in perfect agreement amongst themselves in their accounts of the testimony of the other witnesses who were present. It is true that Paul speaks of his conversion as being absolutely unforeseen, and we possess no reliable documents by which we can contradict him. We can, at any rate, hold that the vivid impressions that Paul carried away of the vision, followed by the fever and blindness when, "he was three days without sight", were the occasion of profound reflection; and that

his conversion-like decision to preach in Damascus, and to proceed to Jerusalem, where he would meet the disciples of Jesus – was the fruit of that conscious reflection and not of the moment of his vision. This, however, is no way contradicts the statements of Paul, that no human instrument intervened in his conversion.

Although Paul was a man of weak constitution, timid, passionate, and possibly an epileptic, he journeyed without ceasing under the impulse of a powerful idealism, preaching, teaching, writing, arguing, exposing himself to grave dangers, and in the end facing martyrdom.

It has been said that the famous conversion of Paul can be explained according to three alternatives: First, the atheistic or rationalistic explanation, an hallucination or an epileptic attack: Second, the naturalistic explanation, which is that Paul already had more or less fleeting perceptions of his mutation, especially in the discussion with Stephen, and when he was present at his martyrdom; that he was surprised by a thunderbolt, a nervous attack, or sunstroke⁽⁴¹⁾ at the very moment when his internal conflict was coming to a crisis; Third, the evangelical explanation, which is that the fact can only be accounted for supernaturally or that it was a direct contact of the spirit of God with the spirit of man.

According to the witnesses, the conversion of Paul was a fulminant crisis. The words of the apostle himself exclude the possibility of his already knowing the Christian faith, either through the apostles or otherwise. He denies that there had been any intervening human instrument in his conversion. But the words of Paul do not exclude his having had personal experiences. His violent hatred against the "sect" is to be taken as a strong argument to the contrary, because the existence of violence presupposes a conflict. This can be borne out by the fact that Paul was present at the trial of Stephen and at his subsequent martyrdom, and that he was aware of the statement by the disciples respecting the Resurrection of Jesus.

One suspects that the fact of the Resurrection is the cardinal point on which hinges the faith and apostolate of Paul. Further, one may ask if the evidence of the subject is entirely trustworthy, even though it may be in good faith. We must always take into account that the vision at the end deepens the obscurity surrounding small past events and subsequently narrows the field of memory. An atheist would argue that the events at Damascus was merely an outward projection of the unconscious mind of Paul but such an explanation does not account for the mutations which occurred in him. The final explanation does not contradict either the first or the second because "grace" could work at certain special moments, and on certain occasions.

Whatever the type of conversion Paul went through, we can say without doubt that his experience on the Damascus road was destined to influence the history of mankind and mankind itself from that day until now.

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- (1) John Mark is another example of a Jew with both a Roman and Jewish name. (Acts. 12:12)
- (2) Acts. 21:40, 22:2.
- (3) Acts. 22:3.
- (4) Acts. 23:5.
- (5) Acts. 8:1.
- (6) Acts. 9:1-19, 22:6-21, 26:12-18.
- (7) Gal. 1:17.
- (8) Whatever the cause, Paul did not take John Mark along on his second missionary journey, which refusal caused a separation between Paul and Barnabus.
- (9) The change from the first person to "we" in Acts. 16:9 implies that Luke, the author of Acts, joined the party at this point.
- (10) Acts. 16:6.
- (11) Acts. 16:7.
- (12) Thess. 3:6.
- (13) Acts. 19:22, Cor. 1:1, 2, Cor. 1:1, 12:17.
- (14) In the second century Pliny the Younger blamed Christianity for the lack of prosperity. The butchers' trade fell off as there was no demand for sacrifices. Later in Arabia the incense trade declined for similar reasons.
- (15) Probably a litany analogous with the "Invocation of Isis".
- (16) Acts. 19:34.
- (17) Paul's statement, "From Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel" is strange as there is no record of any missionary work in that area.
- (18) Rom. 15:23. There is no reason to suppose that Paul ever went to Spain.
- (19) Acts. 28:16.
- (20) Some believe that they were written from his prison in Caesarea or Ephesus.
- (21) viz., in the farewell to the elders of Ephesus (Acts. 20:17-38).
- (22) Gal. 3:24.
- (23) Rom. 1:14-15.

- (24) II Cor. 10:10.
- (25) II Cor. 12:7-8.
- (26) Also refer to Part II dealing with Paul's conversion.
- (27) II Cor. 11:24-29.
- (28) II Cor. 11:28-29.
- (29) I Cor. 9:8-10.
- (30) I Cor. 3:10-15, 4:9, 9:24-27, etc.
- (31) I Cor. 1:12-13, 4:1-5, Phil. 1:15-18.
- (32) Ro. 8:3-4.
- (33) Gal. 2:19.
- (34) Phil. 2:12.
- (35) Phil. 3:21.
- (36) Rom. 6.
- (36) Gal. 1:16.
- (37) II Cor. 5:17.
- (38) I Cor. 15:18.
- (39) Rom. 7:8.
- (40) Although Paul did abrogate the Ten Commandments only to bring them in later.
- (41) It will be remembered that it was at noon when Paul experienced the revelation.